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Arm-twisting, absentees secure Md. vote for MX

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New York—Last-minute arm-twisting by the White House and a high absentee rate among Maryland delegates pledged to Senator Edward M. Kennedy, gave President Carter a narrow victory in the state's delegation yesterday on the MX missile platform plank.

All but 3 of the 15 Carter delegates who came to the Democratic National Convention prepared to vote in favor of a Kennedy minority plank, banning construction of the missile, were persuaded in the final hours before yesterday's vote to support the president's position to favor of the project.

The delegates voted 29-27 to reject the minority plank. But the delegation vote would have been tied 29-29 if the Kennedy forces had been able to muster enough of their delegates or alternates to cast all 26 of their ballots.

Even with Denis Neill, the uncommitted alternate, and two Carter delegates siding with them against the MX, the Kennedy camp garnered a total of only 27 votes for the minority plank, which was defeated by the full convention in a Carter victory.

Among those missing from the delegation vote were at least five members of the Kennedy forces from Prince Georges county, who took the afternoon off together.

Tactics used by the Carter crew to drag their delegates back into the fold created perhaps the most divisive struggle the Maryland delegation has faced this week.

Karen Kuker-Kihl, a Carter delegate from Prince Georges county who is firmly opposed to the MX, was so troubled by the tug-of-war that she abstained from the voting and then watched as the total was announced with tears streaming down her face. "It wasn't the lobbying pressure" that prompted her tears, she insisted. "It was internal pressure."

Ms. Kuker-Kihl was one of eight Maryland Carter delegates summoned from the convention floor just before the vote to meet with Lloyd Cutler, the White House counsel, who told them that if the MX missile is not built the U.S. Senate will not ap-

prove the SALT II nuclear arms-limitation treaty.

"I don't believe in war toys but I do believe in SALT II," she said.

William Pitcher, a Carter delegate from Anne Arundel county also persuaded by Mr. Cutler to change his mind, said, "I'm just hoping SALT II passes based on the MX and that the Senate then kills the MX funding."

Representative Barbara A. Mikulski (D, Md., 3d) tried unsuccessfully to undo the effect of Mr. Cutler's work. She said Mr. Cutler's argument was "like saying you cannot be for gun control unless everybody gets 30 more guns."

But Eileen Rehrman, of Harford county, another of the eight who met with Mr. Cutler, and Gwendolyn Cooke, of Baltimore, who was not taken from the floor because the Carter forces thought she was with them, held firm in their opposition to the missile.

"Each new weapon system increases the danger of nuclear war," Ms. Rehrman said.

"All life will be destroyed if this weapon is used," Dr. Cooke noted. "I don't believe there is any need to take that risk."

The Cutler "threat," as the Kennedy camp called it, was the final move in a series of Carter lobbying tactics on the missile issue.

Yesterday morning, the Maryland Carter delegates were addressed by a Central Intelligence Agency official who, according to Edwin S. Crawford, state Carter coordinator, told them the missile issue is too complex for them to understand and urged them to trust Mr. Carter's judgment.

On the floor yesterday, copies of a handwritten letter from the president, urging defeat of the Kennedy missile plank, were quietly circulated.

Mr. Crawford used a variety of personal approaches to woo delegates his way, including asking those with moral objections to the missile to step aside during the balloting so an alternate who supported the MX could vote in their place.

"As close we have become over the past few days, I feel like most of the delegates wavering will support the missile as a favor to me," Mr. Crawford said before the vote.